

## **Minister Fitzgerald welcomes securing future of universal free pre-school year**

### **Minister Fitzgerald says resources and reforms to be targeted at improving outcomes for Children**

**5th December 2011**

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Frances Fitzgerald TD today (5<sup>th</sup> December) responded to the announcement of the Estimate of €408m to be made available to the Department of Children and Youth Affairs in 2012 and €568.9m for HSE Child and Family Services.

Minister Fitzgerald stated that: *“This is the first Estimates process for my new Department and as part of the national effort to address Ireland’s deficit situation, my Department like all others, has had to find savings. My Department will continue to work to deliver on its mandate to promote better outcomes for children and young people.”*

In total, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs is to achieve savings in 2012 of €16.5 million.

The Minister welcomed the fact that in line with the Programme for Government, the universal free pre-school year is being maintained while her Department was further successful in securing additional provision for the funding requirements of the ECCE programme (free pre-school year) to meet demographic pressures due to an increase in the birth-rate since 2007. Additional provision has also been made for some initial requirements associated with establishing the new Children and Family Support Agency.

Minister Fitzgerald stated: *“The expenditure being committed to the Department of Children & Youth Affairs for 2012 demonstrates this Government’s ongoing commitment to children and to improving their lives and opportunities.*

*“While savings must be made in some areas, our approach to expenditure priorities for 2012 is underpinned by a commitment to improving outcomes for children, in particular through transforming child and family services and the reform of funding streams and delivery mechanisms across all programmes in order to make the best possible use of resources.”*

### **Universal free pre-school year**

As part of the commitment to early years interventions and in line with the Programme for Government, Minister Fitzgerald confirmed that the universal free pre-school year is being maintained and that additional funding is being provided to meet demographic pressures arising from the increased birth rate since 2007. In line with these demographic trends the number of children participating in the programme is set to

increase from 63,000 in 2010 to 68,000 in 2014

The Minister stated: *“This free pre-school year currently attracts 95% of qualifying children. Given the importance of early years education and early interventions to improving the educational and development outcomes for children, my Department has been steadfast in preserving the universality of this scheme.”*

However, in light of the additional funding requirements and noting the need to optimise the Department’s overall resource allocation in 2012-2014, Minister Fitzgerald advised there would be adjustments to the scheme including a reduction of 3% (€2 per week) in the capitation rates paid to pre-school providers and an increase in the maximum staff to child ratios permitted for the programme from 1 staff member to every 10 children to 1 staff member to every 11 children. These measures will be introduced from 1 September 2012.

Minister Fitzgerald also confirmed that the other two childcare support schemes operated by her Department are being maintained with some new measures introduced, as follows.

The Community Childcare Subvention (CCS) programme subsidises childcare to disadvantaged families that use community-based not-for-profit childcare facilities. The number of places under the programme has already been capped with new eligible parents accommodated as others leave the scheme. There are two further changes to CCS being announced today, which will be implemented from September 2012. The first is a reduction in the higher capitation rate, from €100 to €95 for 5 days of full daycare (and pro-rata reductions for halfday/sessional places). The second change, concerning eligibility, is that a person in receipt of welfare will only get the full rate of subvention if they also qualify for a medical card; and if they don’t they will qualify for the lower rate of €50, which has not been reduced.

The Childcare Employment & Training Support (CETS) scheme provides qualifying FAS and VEC students with free childcare places for the duration of their course. Under this programme, childcare is provided to certain FAS and VEC trainees by childcare services, who in turn receive a capitation payment of €170. From September 2012, this capitation will be reduced to €145, and services will be allowed charge a fee of up to €25. In most cases, price competition is expected to see the fee charged to be closer to €10-15. This will be the only contribution payable by trainees to avail of full childcare services. These proposals compare favourably with the regime applying before the introduction of the CETS scheme in September 2010 before which FAS and VEC trainees received only a €63.50 per week contribution to childcare costs.

### **Dedicated budget sub-head for HSE Child & Family Services**

Minister Fitzgerald has announced that ahead of the planned establishment of a new Child and Family Support Agency in 2013, a dedicated new budget sub-head has been established for the first time in the HSE Vote. A provision of €568m has been made for 2012. The equivalent provision in 2011 was €587m. The reduction of 3% is based on

targets for procurement, employment control framework, pay and other efficiency savings applying more generally within the health service Estimate. A process is currently underway in conjunction with the HSE to further review and refine the detailed components of this sub-head.

Minister Fitzgerald stated: *"I am firmly committed to the transformation of Ireland's child protection and welfare services. Central to this is delivering transparent and accountable management and budgeting. The establishment for the first time of a dedicated budget sub-head within the HSE Vote for children and families is an important part of the ongoing 'change agenda' and will pave the way for the transition to the new Child and Family Support Agency in 2013."*

### **Children's Referendum**

Minister Fitzgerald confirmed that €3m is being provided in 2012 for the holding of the Children's Referendum which the Government intends to put before the people.

### **Youth Funding**

Minister Fitzgerald stated: *"I am committed to quality youth work provision and I have directed that youth work funding allocations in coming years will see an increased focus on the provision of youth cafes, protecting voluntary local youth work and the reform of funding streams to provide more flexibility to address the real needs of young people and communities."*

The Minister advised that:

- The capital budget for 2012 will include €1.5m for youth projects, a significant increase from €0.8m in 2011. This will support the further development of youth cafes which is a priority for the Minister and Government.
- There will be no reduction to voluntary local youth work grants given the particular importance she attaches to supporting community-based voluntary activity in the youth work sector.
- There will be 5% saving on other youth funding schemes with further reductions under the Youth Service Grant Scheme applying to national youth organisation headquarters.
- Reductions in youth work funding in subsequent years will be accompanied with significant reforms. Five existing funding schemes which support local staff-led youth work will be merged allowing youth work organisations more flexibility in managing their financial allocations and to reprioritise and reconfigure service provision to better respond to the needs of young people and communities.

### **Education Welfare**

Minister Fitzgerald has confirmed that there will be no reduction in funding for Education Welfare Services provided by the National Education and Welfare Board in 2012.

However, the School Completion Programme will be subject to savings of €2m or 6.5% in 2012.

Minister Fitzgerald stated: *"Both my Department and the National Education Welfare*

*Board will complete a major review of the School Completion Programme by mid 2012, including examining ways for operational efficiencies through better integration with the Home School Liaison Programmes and the Educational Welfare Services.”*

### **Family Support Agency**

Minister Fitzgerald has confirmed that the Family Resource Centres programme will be subject to savings of 5% in 2012 amounting to €0.795m and that funding for counselling grants scheme provided to 28 large organisations and to some 580 smaller organisations will be subject to savings of €1.265m in 2012.

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